

Message Text

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SUBJ: EDITORIAL IN IRISH TIMES JUNE 15, 1977

FOLLOWING EDITORIAL APPEARED IN IRISH TIMES UNDER
HEADING MRS. CARTER'S JOB:

PRESIDENT CARTER'S DECISION TO SEND HIS WIFE ON A TWO-WEEK DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO LATIN AMERICA WAS THOROUGHLY IDIOSYNCRATIC. HE IS NOT THE FIRST PRESIDENT TO ASK HIS FIRST LADY TO SHOW THE FLAG: MRS. NIXON DID SOME CEREMONIAL CHORES FOR HER HUSBAND AND ELEANOR ROOSEVELT FREQUENTLY ACTED AS FDR'S EYES AND EARS. MRS. CARTER, HOWEVER, WENT ABROAD APPARENTLY IN A MORE FORMAL AND HIGH-POWERED DIPLOMATIC CONTEXT THAN HER PREDECESSORS. SHE VISITED SOME SEVEN COUNTRIES - BRAZIL, JAMAICA, PERU, VENEZUELA, COSTA RICA, ECUADOR AND COLOMBIA - IN ALL OF WHICH SHE DISCUSSED HUMAN RIGHTS AND STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE PRESIDENT ATTACHED TO THEM. SHE IS BELIEVED TO HAVE CONFERRED ABOUT ECONOMICS IN JAMAICA, THE ARMS TRADE IN PERU AND ECUADOR, AND DRUG SMUGGLING IN COLOMBIA. ALTOGETHER, IT WAS A FORMIDABLE INITIATION.

INEVITABLY, THERE HAS BEEN SOME CRITICISM AT HOME AND
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IN THE HOST COUNTRIES. THERE WERE THOSE WHO HAD DOUBTS ABOUT PILING SUCH RESPONSIBILITIES ON A FIRST LADY WHO IS STILL VERY MUCH AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY. THE ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE AND AMBITION OF WHICH SHE DISPLAYED THROUGHOUT HER HUSBAND'S REMARKABLE CAMPAIGN WERE GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED: SHE IS OBVIOUSLY AN EXCEPTIONALLY "POLITICAL" PERSON. NEVERTHELESS, IT WAS

FELT IN SOME QUARTERS OF WASHINGTON THAT THERE WERE RISKS INVOLVED IN THROWING HER IN, AS IT WERE, AT THE DEEP END OF LATIN AMERICA, WITH ITS MANY EXPLOSIVE PROBLEMS, WHERE WOMEN POLITICIANS ARE EVEN RARER THAN THEY ARE IN IRELAND AND WHERE THE CULT OF "MALENESS" IS SO STRONG.

THE PRESIDENT MUST HAVE BEEN WELL AWARE THAT DOUBTS WOULD BE RAISED; AND, WHEN HE GREETED HIS WIFE ON HER RETURN HOME THIS WEEK, HE MADE A POINT OF TELLING THE PRESS THAT HER MISSION HAD BEEN "OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE TO HER COUNTRY AND TO THE PEOPLES SHE HAS VISITED." EVEN IF BRAZIL REPORTEDLY WAS MIFFED WHEN SHE SUGGESTED THAT IT SHOULD RATIFY THE AMERICAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, AND COLOMBIA WAS LESS THAN PLEASED WHEN SHE BROACHED THE DELICATE ISSUE OF DRUG-SMUGGLING, MRS. CARTER'S JOURNEY WAS WORTHWHILE, AND THE PRESIDENT'S EAGERNESS TO ENTRUST HER WITH EXPLORATORY DIPLOMATIC DUTIES IS TO BE APPLAUDED. AT THE VERY LEAST, IT IS A VALUABLE GESTURE ON BEHALF OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS. KRENE

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